The Girl, the Jew, and the Maus: Holocaust Narratives in Controversial Media

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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by

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Abstract:

The Diary of a Young Girl, *Maus*, and "The Standover Man" in *The Book Thief* are all unconventional depictions of the Holocaust in that they depart from traditional literary form (diary, graphic novel, and cartoon palimpsest). They have all received scrutiny over the years, however they have value as art as well as potential use as educational tools for children because of the varying levels of minimalism used in their unique media styles. While there is a wealth of research about the Holocaust, as well as a good amount of scholarship on the validity of Holocaust survivor's narratives, the topic of teaching such difficult subjects to children is lacking regarding specific literature such as these. It is the purpose of this research to explore the controversies surrounding these unique narratives as well as their potential as teaching tools. What began as a short paper about the three works has been developed through research and interrogation of the three primary texts as well as the secondary texts referenced throughout. The following research attempts to defend these narratives' place in cultural memory, analyze what is gained and lost by their unique media, and examine their potential use in the educational field. The process has been ongoing since the initial project in 2015, however further conclusions could and should be made by implementing studies that track the emotional and intellectual responses to the texts by children of various ages. Interrogating these texts more closely leads to a deeper appreciation for and understanding of these texts as art, literature, and as educational tools. Finding a better way to teach children about the unimaginable has vast implications for the educational field, and preserving these texts and others like them in our collective memory will help that aim.

Introduction

"Survivors represent our deepest fears, they have descended into Hell and emerged transformed to remind us that the content of our nightmares can burst into the world and consume us" – Kali Tal

The Holocaust narrative, while retaining an inherent margin for error due to the limitations of human memory and retrieval, is essential to our collective understanding and communication of the Holocaust. The following Holocaust narratives have sparked controversy for a variety of reasons. These stories of persistence, found in *The Book Thief* [1] by Markus Zusak, *Maus*[2] by Art Spiegelman, and *The Diary of a Young Girl*[3] by Anne Frank, have been loved or rejected for their content as well as for the media through which they are told. They have all sparked controversy over whether they should be permitted into our collective historical consciousness, especially if they are to be utilized as teaching tools. There is an overwhelming amount of scholarship on the Holocaust, but there is still much debate over when and how the Holocaust should be taught to children. Likewise, while others have delved into the topic of the Holocaust narrative there is still a lack of academic attention given to narratives such as the following that were created in unconventional media. Perhaps this is because literary studies have been, as literary critic N. Katherine Hayles argued: "lulled into somnolence by five hundred years of print" (Hayles 29). Trauma scholar Kali Tal discusses the Holocaust narrative in her book *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, arguing that "testimony is never adequate…it can never bridge the gap between language and experience" (Tal 2). This inadequacy of testimony creates the need for nontraditional narratives such as those analyzed in this study. The power within these Holocaust narratives lies in their unique media that allow the reader to bridge the gap between language and experience and gain insight into the Holocaust in valuable ways by circumnavigating conventional narrative restrictions and forms.

The need for these narratives alone does not justify their acceptance into our cultural memory, however. When considering whether these survivor's narratives should be permitted into our historical consciousness, one must consider the abilities of the human brain to convey accurate memories of traumatic experiences. Brian Schiff et al at Saint Martin's University approached this issue by analyzing the oral history interviews of eight survivors of Auschwitz-Birkenau, studying "patterns of structure and variation in the referential aspects of narrative, how narratives recapitulate past actions, and the evaluative aspects of narrative, how narratives are interpreted" (Schiff et al 349), determining that "changes were, in large measure, observed in 'how' or 'why' the narrative was told but not in "what" was recounted", meaning that "despite changes in context, critical aspects of our identities endure over long periods of time" (Schiff et al 349). In another study conducted by Schiff, one Holocaust survivor was interviewed once at fifty-four years old and again at sixty-seven years old. The data showed that "there is enormous consistency in the structure and content of narratives" (Schiff 189), supporting earlier data from the Netherlands that showed "a remarkable degree of remembering" (Wagenaar and Groeneweg 80) among concentration camp survivors. This points to the fact that while narrative style may shift over time, the events being narrated are told with consistency, and in the same way these unusual narratives can be relied upon just as those told using the conventional style.

Instructing children regarding these and other Holocaust narratives in the classroom has proven difficult for educators over the years for many reasons, with the goal of schoolteachers like Daniel Brown being to maintain the "delicate balance of being honest with facts while not endangering their personal sense of safety" (Brown 73) as they teach their students. There are conflicting arguments as to how Holocaust education should be approached, one of which being that "the Shoah, a human story with universal implications, should be taught utilizing archival

material rather than fictional or composite characters" (Caplan 57) as argued by the coordinator for overseas programming at the International School for Holocaust Studies in Israel. These fictional and composite characters hold great value in the introduction of such difficult material, however. This perspective is supported by comic illustrator Neal Adams and Holocaust historian Rafael Medoff, who have created animated comic episodes such as *They Spoke Out: American Voices of Protest Against the Holocaust* to teach children about the Holocaust that "blend traditional animation and comic book-style illustrations with newsreel footage, photographs, and historical documents" (Karlin). Adams' defense of this method is that "we're not throwing the Holocaust at you…we're offering a way to help American kids experience the Holocaust through these videos, so they can make their own decisions as to how deeply they want to go into further study" (Karlin), allowing for distance that archival material cannot provide.

The need for this distance at the introductory level is important for the prevention of a secondary traumatization. This is supported by the work of trauma theorist Gene Ray who argues that trauma occurs "when reality breaks through the barriers protecting the integrity of the individual" (Ray 143), which can easily occur when students view archival materials from the Holocaust. This secondary traumatization can be avoided through the gradual exposure to Holocaust narratives progressing from the abstraction of written language such as is found in *The Diary of a Young Girl* to written language within pictures such as is found in *Maus* and "The Standover Man" to the pictures themselves. This gradual shifting toward archival materials allows for the prevention of trauma in students learning about the Holocaust because "if the subject is prepared or has time to throw up psychic defenses, then trauma might be avoided" (Ray 143), and the balance of honesty and safety can be maintained.

The use of abstraction in Holocaust narratives in the classroom, in addition to preventing secondary traumatization, has been shown to be a more effective teaching method by experimental lessons such as the one carried out by PhD student Jeremy Johnson who found that "ninety-eight percent of them said they learned more by creating comics than by repeating facts they pulled off the Internet or out of a book. They were more interested and emotionally invested" (Karlin). The distancing provided by nonconventional media as an educational tool allows for students to be placed at a safe distance from trauma and yet still be intrigued enough to more closely interrogate them for meaning, which ultimately leads to longer lasting memory and more effective education.

These Holocaust narratives depicted in an alternative literary form are vital teaching tools for those attempting to educate children about events so sublimely horrific that they can only be initially conveyed through simplicity. This educational perspective is promoted by the Kantian theory of the sublime, which "does not matter so much what the understanding comprehends, but what the feeling senses" (Kant 72) in the beginning. Ray contends that the effect of the Holocaust was so profound as to change the very nature of our understanding of the sublime, causing a shift from the first to second nature, from "the starry heavens above us" to "the moral law within us" as "Kant's effort to ground the sublime in a transcendent or supersensible human nature fails when confronted with the social catastrophe of actual human history, and this failure is the end of the old sublime" (Ray 141). Holocaust narratives such as these then become the faces of the new sublime, ones which address the transcendent good and evil of human nature.

To truly maintain the balance of honesty and safety in the pursuit of the effective education of Holocaust narratives such as these there must be not only a level of abstraction from the historical events to prevent trauma, but the avoidance of solely positive depictions of events

that present an inaccurate message to the students. Because of the emotional distance provided by Holocaust narratives such as these, a negative presentation can be used to maintain academic integrity in instruction for the better education of students who must more deeply interrogate the material which requires "a more active process of spectation-one involving close scrutiny and reflection" (Ray 144). An example of this positive depiction of the Holocaust to the detriment of comprehension can be found in books such as *Anne Frank's Chestnut Tree* by Jane Kohuth, geared toward children ages 5-8.

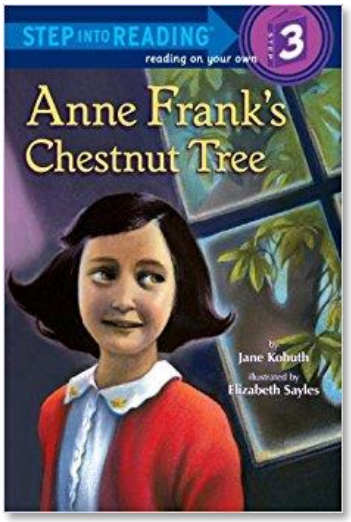


Figure 1. Anne Frank's Chestnut Tree. Jane Kohuth.

I have personal experience attempting to compensate for this book's oversimplification of the Holocaust that left my student with an incomplete understanding of the event. An editorial review from School Library Journal echoes this dissatisfaction, critiquing that "some concepts are oversimplified; for example, the term concentration camp is used but not defined". This very issue became problematic as my student, seven years old, asked me after reading the term what a concentration camp was. My having to incompletely explain this concept was to the detriment of her comprehension of the event, reflecting the argument that "positive presentations deflect rather than spur on the arduous process of critical reflection that alone can reach the level of social truth" (Ray 142), which detract from the student's learning. In this instance the balance of honesty and safety is improperly maintained, and the critique of oversimplification is warranted.

The following Holocaust narratives have come under criticism for different reasons, but they have all have faced charges claiming that they are not legitimate. Despite the value of these narratives as educational tools, their style has been critiqued, sometimes because of their

nonconventional media. Critics of the minimalist style like Carolyn Dean argue that "the demand that victims narrate their suffering in the aesthetically constrained style of 'minimalism' equally undermines the legitimacy of victims' memories by demanding that they be presented in an already mastered form, thereby erasing the very trauma that, in principle, such narratives seek to represent" (Spiegel 423), however this argument of mastery is built on the presumption of the conventional narrative form. This final erasure of Holocaust victims is prevented even as the narrative form is kept from being mastered by the allowance of nonconventional media styles such as these to be included in our historical consciousness. Although no one source can provide the entirety of the events of the Holocaust, these nontraditional works provide information on a large scale even as they, as *The Pianist* screenwriter Ronald Harwood writes, "focus on a particular character, episode or event and strive to discover the essence of what happened and by so doing contribute to the whole" (Harwood 6). Each of these narratives is its own historical work within the broader context of the Holocaust, each expresses a different perspective on the same event, each accomplishes this through different mediums, and each can be taught at varying educational levels to provide a more complete understanding of the Holocaust.

Figure 2. Anne Frank Writing. Anne Frank.org.

The Girl in the Attic

"Even though I'm only fourteen, I know what I want, I know who's right and who's wrong, I have my own opinions, ideas and principles, and though it may sound odd coming from a teenager, I feel I'm more of a person than a child." – Anne Frank

The Girl in the attic was not born there, but had been driven into hiding in an attic with her family and others in the same situation. Annelies Marie Frank was born in Amsterdam on June 12th, 1929, but was forced into hiding to flee Nazi persecution when she was

thirteen. She kept a diary from June 12, 1942, to August 1, 1944 before her capture. Anne died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp at only fifteen years old, but her diary, named “Kitty”, was saved by family friend Miep Gies after Anne’s arrest. Anne’s father, Otto, survived the Holocaust and published it in 1947. Even after Otto’s edits, *The Diary of a Young Girl* is the closest Holocaust narrative out of these selections to the events described within it. Despite this, Anne’s approach to her situation is the most removed out of the three narratives, making *The Diary of a Young Girl* the most suitable for younger children. The many versions and adaptations of *The Diary of A Young Girl* have made it one of the most famous literary works of all time, but to Anne it was simply “Kitty”.

Anne describes the secret annex, located at 263 Prinsengracht, as being “an ideal place to hide in” (Frank 22). She continues with the childishly optimistic claim that “it may be damp and lopsided, but there's probably not a more comfortable hiding place in all of Amsterdam. No, in all of Holland” (Frank 22). Anne’s optimism throughout her narrative is one of many things that make her diary a useful and effective teaching tool for children, because it is exemplary of many other testimonies of Jewish children during the Holocaust who, “even when they knew that death was near—dreamed, prayed and hoped for a better future” (Caplan 68) and allows children to see the Jewish narrator and by extension the other Jews in hiding as more than eternal victims. Anne also references outward even in her optimism, acknowledging that she and the other members of the secret annex “live in a paradise compared to the Jews who aren't in hiding” (Frank 77), causing the reader to consider other narratives like that of Vladek Spiegelman who was unable to reflect on his experiences as they happened but had to return to them much later to tell his story.

Anne’s optimism does not detract from the historical accuracy of the situation, however, as the political climate during Anne Frank’s short life is described by her in increasingly defined

and anxious terms as time goes on and the situation in the Annex becomes more desperate. Anne eventually describes feeling that "the clouds are moving in on us, and the ring between us and the approaching danger is being pulled tighter and tighter" (Frank 108), unintentionally foreshadowing her eventual capture and death. There are many passages that strike the reader with both realism and optimism that support the educational balance of honesty and safety when teaching Anne's narrative to children, such as: "I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more" (Frank 244). The final entry in Anne's diary dated at Tuesday, August 1st, 1944, ends with her resolution to "keep trying to find a way to become what I'd like to be and what I could be if . . . if only there were no other people in the world" (Frank 247) followed by the message: ANNE'S DIARY ENDS HERE. This message brings the reader back to the realization that these impassioned thoughts were all contained within a finite, material object that cannot contain the entirety of Anne's story because of its materiality. Historians would have Anne's diary continue, but for the purposes of educating children about the Holocaust the fact that this narrative abruptly ends here is vital to its balance of honesty and safety. The ending of the narrative causes the reader to consider the end of Anne's life without reading every detail and risking secondary trauma. This ideal situation is only brought about because the diary is a material object that Anne was unable to take with her to the end of her life.

The Diary of a Young Girl holds its cultural significance in large part because it is a material object that was rescued by Miep Gies, edited and circulated by Anne's father, and has become "among the most enduring documents of the twentieth century" and "remains a beloved

Figure 3. Kitty, Anne's diary. AnneFrank.org.

and deeply admired testament to the indestructible nature of the human spirit" (Pressler 1). The materiality of Anne's diary is of utmost importance when one considers the way Anne's attitude toward it shifted over time.

Anne's relationship with her diary develops over the course of the two years spent in the secret annex, to the point that it transcends paper and becomes Anne's dearest friend. Anne imbues Kitty with agency through imagined powers of reason, sight, and emotions even as she is fighting to maintain her own agency while among those who would forcibly take it from her. Anne's increased dependency upon the diary throughout the course of her confinement is made clear through statements like "the nicest part is being able to write down all my thoughts and feelings; otherwise, I'd absolutely suffocate" (Frank 164). This increased dependency manifests itself throughout the course of the book, but also can be seen clearly through a dramatic shift in Anne's narrative style in the form of how she addresses Kitty and expects Kitty to address her.

Anne's salutations and ending signatures can be seen to change gradually as her relationship with the diary changes. At first Anne calls it "this stiff-backed notebook grandly referred to as a 'diary'" (Frank 8), before deciding "I want the diary to be my friend, and I'm going to call this friend Kitty" (Frank 9). Anne's diary serves as a placeholder for an animate friend even before Anne was in physical solitude. Anne writes: "I've never had a real friend" (Frank 6) "that's just how things are, and unfortunately they're not liable to change. This is why I've started the diary" (Frank 9). Anne's language shows her ambivalence toward the diary as an object, but the expression of her loneliness shows the potential for a closer relationship later.

The personification and informality of Anne's address increases with time, and by June of 1942 she calls her diary "Dearest Kitty!" (Frank 10). In May of 1943 her salutation becomes "Dearest Kit" (Frank 79) and at the same time Anne begins to sign "Yours, Anne" (Frank 80) as if writing to a friend. The relationship continues as Kitty is given all the inherent knowledge that Anne herself has. Examples can be found when Anne tells Kitty "you know who I mean" (Frank 38) and later feels the need to defend herself, writing "I'm not prudish, Kitty" (Frank 120), presumably because Anne herself is defensive about that subject. A key moment in Anne's relationship with Kitty occurs when she writes "Dearest Kitty, This morning, when I had nothing to do, I leafed through the pages of my diary" (Frank 118). Here Kitty has transcended being a diary, as Anne has separated her friend from the inanimate object of the diary itself.

This brief sentence gives the reader a great deal of insight into the way Anne's diary functioned as a transitional object for her. Doctor of philosophy James Curtis explains this concept of "a 'transitional phase' where children use 'transitional objects' (like the proverbial 'security blanket') to aid in negotiating their own place in the world at large" (Curtis 30), as a part of childhood development. A child such as Anne who has a transitional object such as Kitty use it "to negotiate his or her own social, emotional, and mental space in his or her gradual progression towards independence and self-identity" (Curtis 33). Evidence that Anne was going through this transitional phase at the time of her writing is supported by the fact that those in the mist of this phase undergo a time of "blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and reality" (Curtis 35), that the transcendence of the diary points toward. While this stage is typically seen at a younger age in childhood development, Anne's extreme circumstance and absence of socialization accounts for a later transitional phase.

Anne places a great deal of trust in Kitty, writing: “I know you'll keep a secret, no matter what happens” (Frank 119). This trust is key, as “for the child who is undergoing the transitional phase, the transitional object itself is just as real as everything else in the child’s life” (Curtis 34). Anne even gives Kitty a voice as time goes on, writing: “I know exactly what you're going to say, Kitty. ‘But, Anne, are these words really coming from your lips?’” (Frank 127). In addition to the powers of reason and speech, Kitty is given the ability to feel, as Anne muses: “Dearest Kitty, This morning I was wondering whether you ever felt like a cow, having to chew my stale news over and over again until you're so fed up with the monotonous fare that you yawn and secretly wish Anne would dig up something new” (Frank 132).

As Anne matures she returns to a more formal style, and in February of 1944 she begins signing her full name and calling Kitty “My dearest darling” (Frank 164), which she later explains as being from “a movie with Dorit Kreysler, Ida Wust and Harald Paulsen” (Frank 199). After Anne is made aware of the potential for the publication of her work, she begins to see Kitty as less of a friend and more of a pragmatic, if still romantic, way to “go on living even after [her] death” (Frank 185) and begins looking toward her future. Anne is still attached to her dearest friend near the end of her life, writing: “if my diary goes, I go too!” (Frank 190), however this re-establishment of Kitty’s inanimate status shows that Anne’s diary has served its purpose as a transitional object, since “one of the more vital functions of the transitional object is that it allows for the child to negotiate the space between fantasy and reality” (Curtis 34). Anne’s successful journey through this phase is supported by her personal comments during this time in which she reviewed her writing and commented things like “I wouldn't be able to write that kind of thing anymore” (Frank 46). Just as Anne’s diary served as a transitional object in her development, the resulting Holocaust narrative contained within the material object has the

potential to serve as a metaphorical transitional object for those beginning to learn about the Holocaust and requiring mediation between fantasy and reality.

Unlike the testimonies of the Holocaust survivors studied by Schiff and others, there is no way to test Anne's story for consistency over time. Therefore, the issues pertaining to her diary have centered around its legitimacy in the first place. While the diary medium struck a chord with audiences around the world, it has sparked controversy, as well. The materiality of the diary came under fire specifically when aspersions were cast by the German Federal Criminal Police Office called the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) that portions of the diary had been written using a ballpoint pen. The Anne Frank House included this false claim in their article: "Ten Questions on the authenticity of the diary of Anne Frank"[5], explaining that "the 'ballpoint myth' is based on the simple fact that, around 1960, two annotation sheets with ballpoint writing were inserted between the original pages. These texts were written by a graphological researcher, and are not included in any edition of the diary (apart from the Critical Edition, where photos of the annotation sheets are reproduced)" (6). The BKA later retracted their accusation, but the diary has been so thoroughly controversial over the years that it has undergone multiple "book autopsies" that have testified to its authenticity.

In 1959, Anne Frank's writing was studied by handwriting experts in Germany who concluded that ''the text published in German translation as *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank* may be considered true to its sources in substance and ideas" (Barnouw 87). The most notable and detailed investigation into the diary's authenticity was performed by the Netherlands Forensic Institute at the request of the National Institute for War Documentation**.** The resulting 250-page report concludes: "the report of the Netherlands Forensic Institute has convincingly demonstrated that both versions of the diary of Anne Frank were written by her in the years 1942 to 1944. The

allegations that the diary was the work of someone else...are thus conclusively refuted" (Barnouw 186).

A key issue that afflicts *The Diary of a Young Girl* far more than the other Holocaust narratives is one more heavily impactful on those told through nonconventional literary media, especially within the context of assessment as an educational tool. This question is whether the sacrifice of the narrative's original materiality for the sake of universality is a worthwhile endeavor. There were many processes of compiling, editing, revising, translating, and media shifting that had to occur before most readers can gain access to it. For example, here is a delineation of the various forms the diary appeared in before it was read by myself:

Figure 4. Anne's Original Manuscript. AnneFrank.org.

Figure 5. Otto Frank's Revisions. AnneFrank.org.

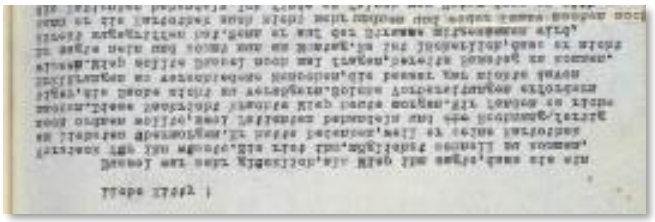


Figure 6. German Typescript. AnneFrank.org.

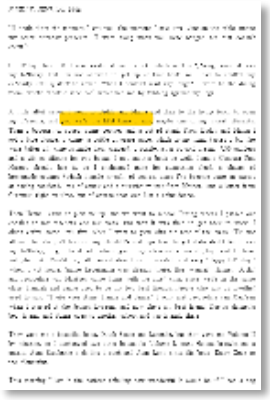


Figure 7. English E-Reader. Readanybook.com.

This stark media shifting causes one to question the assurance of the foreword to the definitive version of the diary that "Anne's spelling and linguistic errors have been corrected.

Otherwise, the text has basically been left as she wrote it, since any attempts at editing and clarification would be inappropriate in a historical document" (Pressler 4), but what exactly has been changed when transitioning from the original manuscript to the computer screen? This is not a simple question to answer, as "the relationships between different media are as diverse and complex as those between different organisms coexisting within the same ecotome" (Hayles 5), however, without the diary form we lose "the rich interplay between subtext and context, word and image" (Hayles 85) that Anne's original manuscript provides. In sacrificing this form one loses "the dynamic interplay between words, nonverbal marks, and physical properties of the page [that] work together to construct the book's materiality" (Hayles 124). The original format of *The Diary of a Young Girl* is a key contributor as to why it is a "triumphantly and heartbreakingly human" (Pressler 1) narrative, however this transition is not a complete loss.

Figure 8. Anne's dynamic diary. AnneFrank.org.

"the dynamic interplay between words, nonverbal marks, and physical properties of the page work together to construct the book's materiality"

(Hayles 124)

At the expense of the more humanizing elements of this Holocaust narrative there is an advance in its effectiveness as teaching tool in the pursuit of spreading more universal knowledge of this event, especially one of such historical importance. The media shifting of *The Diary of a Young Girl* can then be seen more positively, as this transition that occurs between the handwritten page and the screen is still being utilized for the education of "the transition

generation raised and formed by print but increasingly molded by electronic environments" (Hayles 10) in various ways. One of these ways that the Anne Frank House is bridging the gap between language and experience in hopes of bettering the education of children about this event is a virtual tour of the secret annex[6], complete with biographies and sound effects. This is an excellent way to reach more students while still maintaining more material aspects of Anne's life, however the only quotations from the diary itself are still typed. A virtual tour of the original format of Anne's diary is still needed, and would be an important addition to this project.

In addition to the question of the material diary's authenticity in the mainstream is the question of the character of Anne Frank herself, and unfortunately unlike the other authors of the Holocaust narratives addressed here, Anne Frank is not here to defend herself or her work. A critique of *The Diary of Anne Frank* is that Anne's age allows for the potential exploitation of the Holocaust narrative. Columbia professor Mark Anderson posits that "while rhetorically effective, the figure of the child victim can also distort, personalize, and dehistoricize the Holocaust, providing a false sense of solidarity and understanding" (Anderson 1). Anne's young age certainly improved her narrative's popularity, as "children have consistently proved to be the most moving and believable witnesses" (Anderson 2), but her age is a key reason why *The Diary of a Young Girl* is taught to children. Anne's age was instrumental to her marketability in the mainstream, begging the question: "if a bearded Polish rabbi or a wealthy German-Jewish businessman had written a comparable memoir (and many did), would big-name publishers, Broadway producers, and Hollywood moguls have rushed to make their stories known?" (Anderson 5), but for children's education there is no better narrative than one written by someone their own age.

The materiality of *The Diary of a Young Girl* is highly important when approaching the difficult balance of honesty and safety when teaching the events of the Holocaust to children. Because of its material form, Anne was unable to take it with her to the end of her life, which serves as both a somber reminder of the depth of the narrative's importance while also shielding children from secondary trauma. Another reason the diary's materiality is so important is because it has sparked a great deal of controversy as to its legitimacy even to this day, though prior claims have been proven false. Unfortunately, for Anne's story to be spread to the extent it has, the diary's original form has had to be greatly changed, but there is a way to reclaim some of the diary's humanity. The need for this Holocaust narrative's emotional elements to remain intact as well as the need for it to be able to be seen by many can both be satisfied to some degree, namely with the addition of a virtual tour of Anne's diary to the virtual tour of the secret annex. Throughout her narrative Anne's optimism balances her realism, allowing for emotional distance in an educational setting that makes it an excellent teaching tool for children. Just as Kitty served as a transitional object for Anne, *The Diary of a Young Girl* can serve as a transitional object for those learning about her to gradually introduce them to this material.

Figure 9. The Standover Man. Deviantart.com.

The Jew in the Basement

"When death captures me…he will feel my fist in his face." – Max Vandenberg

Max Vandenberg had arrived at the doorstep of the Hubermanns, a family in Munich who did not agree with the Nazi party, holding a copy of *Mein Kampf* after escaping Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, during which his home had been raided and he had had to flee for his life. Max asked Hans

Hubermann, the father, if he still played the accordion, which revealed Max's identity as the son of Erik Vandenberg, the man who had saved Hans' life during the First World War. The Hubermanns hid Max in their basement, and he became fast friends with Liesel Meminger, the Hubermanns' adopted daughter. Max decided to surprise Liesel, a girl who had stolen books even before she could read, with her favorite thing in the world: a book. Painting over *Mein Kampf*, Max wrote and illustrated "The Standover Man".

"The Standover Man" is Max's autobiographical narrative in which he illustrates several "standover men" who have made an impact on his life, such as his father and childhood friends. Interestingly, a "standover man" in Zusak's native Australia is defined by Collins English Dictionary as "a person who extorts money by intimidation". Liesel functions as the final standover man, but in a positive way more reflective of a guardian angel than an anxiety-inducing authority figure. Max's narrative is a palimpsest in which he creates the cartoon depiction of his life over a whitewashed copy of *Mein Kampf*. This intentional washing over of history in the form of turning one narrative into another allows for physical and metaphorical depth when teaching this narrative to children that creates a space for them to reach outward from this individual narrative to the broader context of the Holocaust. Jenni Adams, associate university teacher at the University of Sheffield, points out that in Max's narrative "Hitler's words are still visible in places through the paint" (Adams 4), as if to note that Max's narrative is still affected by Hitler. This metaphor requires an audience who can understand it, making this narrative appropriate for young adult readers. The materiality of this Holocaust narrative is integral to its meaning, and Zusak describes Max's creation of "The Standover Man" in detail:

> Max had cut out a collection of pages from Mein Kampf and painted over them in white. He then hung them up with pegs on some string, from one end of the basement to the

> other. When they were all dry, the hard part began. He was educated well enough to get by, but he was certainly no writer, and no artist. Despite this, he formulated the words in his head till he could recount them without error. Only then, on the paper that had bubbled and humped under the stress of drying paint, did he begin to write the story. It was done with a small black paintbrush. *The Standover Man* (Zusak 223).

By painting over Hitler's words, Max attempts to create a tabula rasa for his narrative. It should also be noted that Max's minimalistic narrative style is due not to an intentional departure from the norm, but because it is the only way he can express himself. The minimalism of this Holocaust narrative therefore is not reflective of a forced experience in an already mastered literary medium contributing to the final erasure of the Holocaust victim, but rather it is reflective of the forced experience brought about by the language barrier Max faced. This fact gives the minimalist style of "The Standover Man" that much more poignancy and utility in an educational setting. Zusak continues with his detailed description of the narrative's creation:

> He calculated that he needed thirteen pages, so he painted forty, expecting at least twice as many slipups as successes. There were practice versions on the pages of the Molching Express, improving his basic, clumsy artwork to a level he could accept. As he worked, he heard the whispered words of a girl. 'His hair,' she told him, 'is like feathers'. When he was finished, he used a knife to pierce the pages and tie them with string" (Zusak 223)

Like the other authors of the Holocaust narratives discussed here, Max edited his narrative, intentionally practicing on materials that were not *Mein Kampf* before creating his final work. This choice is key to understanding his narrative because the usage of *Mein Kampf* was

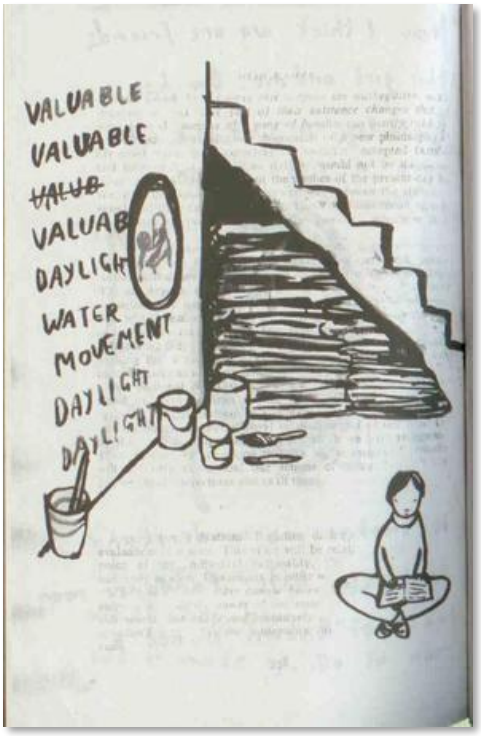
not out of necessity but was an intentional act on Max's part to form the "essential link between suffering and imagination" (Foy & Rojcewicz 141). Max's animal choice is also intentionally based on his relationship with Liesel. The text alone of Max's narrative reads as follows:

> All my life, I've been scared of men standing over me.
>
> I suppose my first standover man was my father, but he vanished before I could remember him.
>
> For some reason when I was a boy, I liked to fight. A lot of the time, I lost. Another boy, sometimes with blood falling from his nose, would be standing over me.
>
> Many years later, I needed to hide. I tried not to sleep because I was afraid of who might be there when I woke up. But I was lucky. It was always my friend.
>
> When I was hiding, I dreamed of a certain man. The hardest was when I traveled to find him.
>
> Out of sheer luck and many footsteps, I made it.
>
> I slept there for a long time. Three days, they told me...and what did I find when I woke up? Not a man, but someone else, standing over me.
>
> As time passed by, the girl and I realized we had things in common.
>
> But there is one strange thing. The girl says I look like something else.
>
> Now I live in a basement. Bad dreams still live in my sleep. One night, after my usual nightmare, a shadow stood above me. She said, "Tell me what you dream of." So I did.
>
> In return, she explained what her own dreams were made of.
>
> Now I think we are friends, this girl and me. On her birthday, it was she who gave a gift - to me.
>
> It makes me understand that the best standover man I've ever known is not a man at all...
>
> (Zusak 224-236)

This version is still profound; however, it is not the way either Zusak or Max intended for it to be experienced and learned. Max's choice to paint images along with his words was not to show off his artistic ability, but were created because it was the only way he could manage to

communicate the full depth of his narrative and message to Liesel. Zusak tells us that Max's choice of anthropomorphized beings was because it had personal meaning to his relationship with Liesel, but since in this Holocaust narrative there is an extra layer of removal from the subject one must consider the implications of what Zusak's choice of using anthropomorphized beings in "The Standover Man" could mean. After describing Max's creative process, Zusak reveals the finished product: "the result was a thirteen-page booklet that went like this:

Figures 10-16. The Standover Man. The Book Thief 224-236.



Markus Zusak's process of creation has a much different origin than Max's, but both are rooted in the creation of new, beautiful narratives from old, tragic ones. Heidi Stillman, writer of the stage adaptation of *The Book Thief*[7], interviewed Zusak about the origins of this Holocaust narrative. Zusak tells Stillman: "you could say the concept of the book was always there. It was waiting while I was growing up in Sydney, listening to my parents' stories in the kitchen with my brother and two sisters. In so many ways, that's where the book truly began" (Stillman).

Zusak's mother is from Munich and his father is from Vienna and Zusak grew up hearing their stories from the Holocaust. In his Printz Award Honor Speech, Zusak thanks his parents for giving him these stories, explaining that a core part of his wish to give this story to the world was to highlight that there is beauty amid tragedy:

> We heard about German teenagers giving bread to Jewish people being marched to concentration camps. We heard how the Jewish people were whipped for taking the bread. And we heard how the teenagers were whipped for giving them the bread. . . . I remember being stunned by the ugly world I was told about, but more so by the moments of beauty that existed there as well. I wanted to write about those moments. (YALS 16)

"The Standover Man" is a compelling narrative that illustrates this beauty in the wake of the Holocaust that is quintessential to the larger story of *The Book Thief*, although it was not featured in the 2013 full length film[8], *The Book Thief*. In another interview Zusak discusses the personal importance of this narrative to him, saying: "I was just trying to write a book that would

mean something to me. And I was lucky: I've written four books that mean something to me, and one book that means everything to me" (Biedenharn 63). The power of this Holocaust narrative's prose, palimpsest form, and minimalist style is appreciated by many young readers, but one must determine whether it is too far removed from the original event to determine whether it be used to educate children about the Holocaust.

While *The Book Thief* is beloved by readers and the majority of critics alike, there are still several controversies that it has been forced to contend with. The foremost critique is that *The Book Thief* is not a true work of history because it is too removed from the reality of a historical account. Supporters of *The Book Thief* like University of Colorado-Boulder professor Annjeanette Wiese argue that this removal is in fact a strength, as "such hybrid forms use truthiness as a qualifier of fictional truth in a nonfiction context (or vice versa) to force us to reflect simultaneously on both fact and fiction" (Wiese 66); that the removal from the original narrative causes readers to more closely interrogate the text to find and comprehend its meaning. This removal also serves to shelter the learner from trauma, as "the experience of thinking trauma *itself threatens to become traumatic,* for it brings experience up to the limit beyond which the social real abides as a seething force of violence which at any time can pull the thinker into an encounter for which no one can be fully prepared" (Ray 146). This trauma is avoided by the fictionalized account of events framed within a real, historical context.

The Book Thief has been controversial for "the atypicality of Holocaust material as a subject matter for young people's literature" (Adams 2), but the atypical material –especially when approached through the minimalist format of "The Standover Man"—is shown to be quite beneficial for the education of children about the Holocaust. "The Standover Man" has inspired a project called "Standover Man Stories"[9], where children are encouraged to learn by creating their

own narrative in this unconventional style. An artist named Askede animated pages[10-11] from "The Standover man" that bring the narrative more to life. The themes, distance, and form of "The Standover Man" effectively balances the need for both honesty and safety in Holocaust narrative education as "Holocaust literature for young people negotiates the conflicting imperatives of protection from and exposure to trauma" (Adams 2), and The *Book Thief* accomplishes this balance as a fictional yet effective introduction to learning about the Holocaust.

Figure 17. Vladek Spiegelman. Maus.

The Maus in the Ghetto

"It would take many *books, my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories." – Vladek Spiegelman*

Vladek Spiegelman ran throughout Europe for many months to escape the Nazis, before eventually being captured and freed from Auschwitz. Vladek destroyed his late wife's written narrative about her time in Auschwitz, but later told his own story to his son, Art, who spent thirteen years using the material to write two graphic novels: *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* and *Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here my Troubles Began*. The *Maus* novels depict Vladek's life story, while continually breaking the fourth wall and reverting to a present-day narrative, complete with its own struggles. In 1992, *Maus* became the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize.

Post-Maus, Spiegelman compiled and wrote *MetaMaus,* in which he addresses many of the critiques and questions about *Maus* by describing the background and thought processes of his work. In *MetaMaus* Spiegelman discusses the issues of memory when writing *Maus* and explains

his decision to write about the Holocaust, to portray the Jewish protagonists as mice, and to tell his family's story through the unconventional comic medium. *MetaMaus* also details the processes of creating *Maus*, its external inspirations, and the backlash *Maus* received.

One of the main issues with *Maus* is its dependence on Vladek's post-war memory of the events he had experienced. Spiegelman does not deny this inherent difficulty when working with the Holocaust narrative, saying: "memory is a very fugitive thing. I was aware of it at the time as part of the problem and part of the process" (Spiegelman 28). *Maus* is further described by Spiegelman as being "ghosts of ghosts, standing on the fragile foundations of memory" (Spiegelman 155). Spiegelman's tactics for memory retrieval was to ask similar questions on many different occasions, starting Vladek's memory and then letting him talk as much as possible without interruption to "triangulate the event and allow his memory to be subsumed in the grander memory" (Spiegelman 30). Spiegelman intentionally highlighted the inevitable shortcomings of memory while maintaining the integrity of his father's narrative in creative ways, such as in the segment in fig. 18.

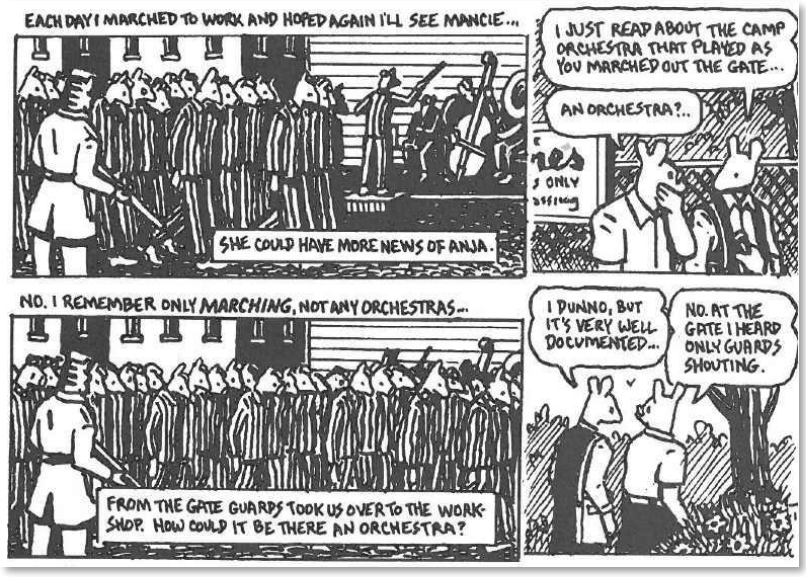


Figure 18. The Orchestra. Maus II.

The drawing is intentionally made to show that the band, while there, was simply not remembered by Vladek, but "vanishes" in the next frame when Vladek is speaking about how they were not there. The instruments can still be seen, giving Art the last word.

Another instance of this can be found in Vladek's recounting of the murder of children, afterwards telling Art that he did not see it with his own eyes. Art creatively makes use of the text bubbles made possible by the nontraditional graphic novel format to succinctly reflect this dissonance:

Figure 19. Page 108.
Maus.

Maus has been further accused of being disrespectful toward Holocaust survivors because the unconventional graphic novel format has been perceived as being in violation of the reverence traditionally given to the subject. *Maus* critics like Professor Emily Miller Budick argue that Vladek's Holocaust narrative is causing him to be "retraumatized [sic] by his son's ventures into witnessing his historical past" (Budick 384). Budick argues that "in the case of historical events such as the Holocaust, we may have to think very sternly about what justifies such transgressive staging of the self" (Budick 389), but Spiegelman addresses the danger of this committing this transgression, outlining the difficulties faces while creating a narrative "in a culture saturated with Holocaust stories that feel safely in the past to most Americans—and can seem like a genre, even, to be dipped into for its pathos and historical lessons" (Spiegelman 42). Maus is decidedly lacking in lessons of any kind, such as those that can be gleaned from *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Book Thief* as mechanisms for the instruction of children, which is why it the latter are a necessary introduction to the topic before children are exposed to *Maus* at an older age.

The fact that Holocaust fiction is seen by many as having become a trope is a fact not taken lightly by Spiegelman during his composition of *Maus*. Spiegelman's need to tell his fathers' story was partially derived from the fact that "Churchill's war seemed to have very little to do with the one [his] parents went through" (Spiegelman 44), and he felt that there was room for an alternative narrative. Spiegelman describes his process of approaching this subject matter: "I tried to see Auschwitz as clearly as I could. It was a way of forcing myself and others to look at it" (Spiegelman 60). Spiegelman's response to the question about *Maus'* controversial subject matter is succinctly: "'Don't you think a comic book about Auschwitz is in bad taste?'" "'No, I thought Auschwitz was in bad taste'" (Spiegelman 155).

A key complaint about *Maus* is Spiegelman's depiction of his main characters as "simple, anthropomorphized Spiegel-mice" (MetaMaus 145). *Maus* has been criticized as being merely "a cartoon version of one of history's most appalling human chapters" (Budick 391) due to its graphic novel formatting and anthropomorphizing throughout. The unconventional formatting is accused of creating an "excessive fictionality *[sic]* that breaches a…taboo in Holocaust writing" (Budick 379), although *Maus* in many ways serves as the Holocaust narrative most dutifully striving for realism.

Supporters of the anthropomorphizing in *Maus* like Purdue professor Wendy Stallard Flory have argued that this fictionalization heightens the realism of the piece, as "the dialogue gives such a detailed sense of the people presented that, although they have the heads of mice, we think of them as human" (Flory 37). Spiegelman's inventive anthropomorphizing of the characters in Maus has sparked a great deal of resistance, but it is precisely "the almost anonymous mouse masks" (Metamaus 19) that force the reader to perceive the characters as not only truly human, but as universal reflections of themselves and their humanity. This is because,

as cartoonist and comics theorist Scott McCloud argues in his book *Understanding Comics*[12], "the more cartoony a face is…the more people it could be said to describe" (McCloud 31,4). By simplifying the characters in his story, Spiegelman has created a pathos between reader and survivor, placing both in the narrative in an ingenious way. Even the critics admit that "Spiegelman's choice to represent his human beings as animals…forces us to acknowledge that, however they look to us…they are all human beings all the same" (Budick 389). This convention has universal applications, evidenced by the fact that *Maus* has been translated into roughly thirty different languages and circulated across the globe.

Figure 20. A Spanish Translation. Maus.

Spiegelman's decision to portray Jews as mice has historical merit, as well. Spiegelman recounts the fact that "there were echoes and precursors for this kind of imagery of Jews as vermin built into the Nazi project itself" (Spiegelman 113) and that this dehumanization was a critical part of the final solution. As we can see in posters such as this one from occupied Denmark, "posters of killing the vermin and making them flee were part of the overarching metaphor" (Spiegelman 116) for the elimination of the Jews. The creation of these Spiegel-mice as a method of inciting pathos for the Jews turns Hitler's metaphor on itself while simultaneously creating a Holocaust narrative that is distanced enough from reality to buffer the potential for secondary trauma when building on students' understanding of the Holocaust. Spiegelman's anthropomorphizing tactics to circumvent the provisions of the sacred are not a new phenomenon, however.

Figure 21. "Rats. Destroy Them." 1940s poster from occupied Denmark.

Figure 22. The Bird's Head Haggadah. Jewish Heritage Online Magazine.

The Bird's Head Haggadah is the oldest surviving Ashkenazi illuminated manuscript (dated c. 1300), named for the birdlike, but human, figures in the manuscript's margins. The rationale behind this anthropomorphizing is the maintenance of the sacred, namely "the biblical (Second Commandment) prohibition against creating graven images" (JHOM)[13]. In the *Birds' Head Haggadah*, "the realistic human figure is avoided by providing it with the head and beak of a bird, but also by distorting or hiding it — with helmets, bulbous noses, and blank faces" (JHOM). Just as the bird's head haggadah illustrators were not permitted to make graven images and found inventive ways around the restriction, Spiegelman was prohibited socially from making realistic images about the Holocaust, because of its historical sacredness, and therefore used anthropomorphic illustrations instead.

Figure 23. The Bird's Head Haggadah. Jewish Heritage Online Magazine.

Counterintuitively distorting and hiding aspects of the self to highlight the reality underneath is used several times in *Maus*, such as when Vladek and Anja wear pig masks to appear Polish but their tails are clearly visible or when Art is seen from the side wearing a mouse mask while working at his drafting table.

Figure 24. Vladek and Anja try to appear Polish. Maus.

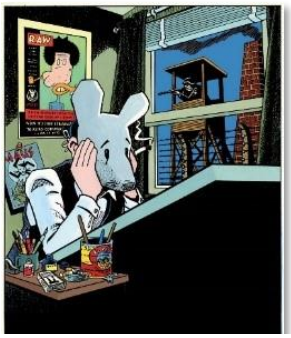


Figure 25. Art at his drafting table. Maus.

Spiegelman further plays with this convention in *MetaMaus* in strips like this that show his struggles with identity while at the same time toying with the expectations of the reader:

Figure 26. Unmasking.
MetaMaus

Spiegelman justifies his use of anthropomorphized creatures to portray the controversial subject matter of the Holocaust, saying "it's those animal masks that allowed me to approach otherwise unsayable things" (Spiegelman 127), which supports the argument that *Maus* and the other Holocaust narratives, because of their controversial media usage, are the faces of the new sublime. He further states that "while the mice allowed for a distancing from the horrors described, they simultaneously allowed me and others to get further inside the material in a way that would have been difficult with more realistic representation" (Spiegelman 149), making *Maus* an excellent teaching tool for students willing to dig deeper into the narrative but still maintain their safety.

Even before *Maus* critics view the content, they disapprove of its unconventional graphic novel format. *Maus* must combat the overly prescriptive idea that considers graphic novels oxymoronic. Minnesota State University professor Donald Larsson, in his book *of* Maus *and Manga*, makes the argument that a graphic novel is far more complex than a comic strip, because "once these individual episodes and strips are assembled within a book…they become something new, making the book more than a container for the narrative" (Larsson 44). *Maus* must face the unfortunate reality that "the graphic novel is still largely an outsider's art form" (Larsson 44) in

addition to its other hurdles. Another critique of the graphic novel medium is that the visual narration is too quick, "allow[ing] comic book images to…provide 'quick answers' and 'instant gratification'" (Larsson 45). The critics who have taken this perspective are missing out on all that *Maus* offers. Spiegelman's detailing and symbolism can be seen even from the first frame of his graphic novel, and while "the page at first glance looks fairly simple, and it may be read quickly…a quick reading will miss the page's extraordinary complexity and the ambiguity that both highlights and brings into question the author's more overt political statements and questions" (Larsson 46). A close reading is necessary to understand *Maus*; as McCloud says: "a simple style doesn't necessitate simple story" (McCloud 45,3). Although the deceptively minimalistic cartoon style appears to be the most suitable for young children, Maus is appropriate for more mature readers.

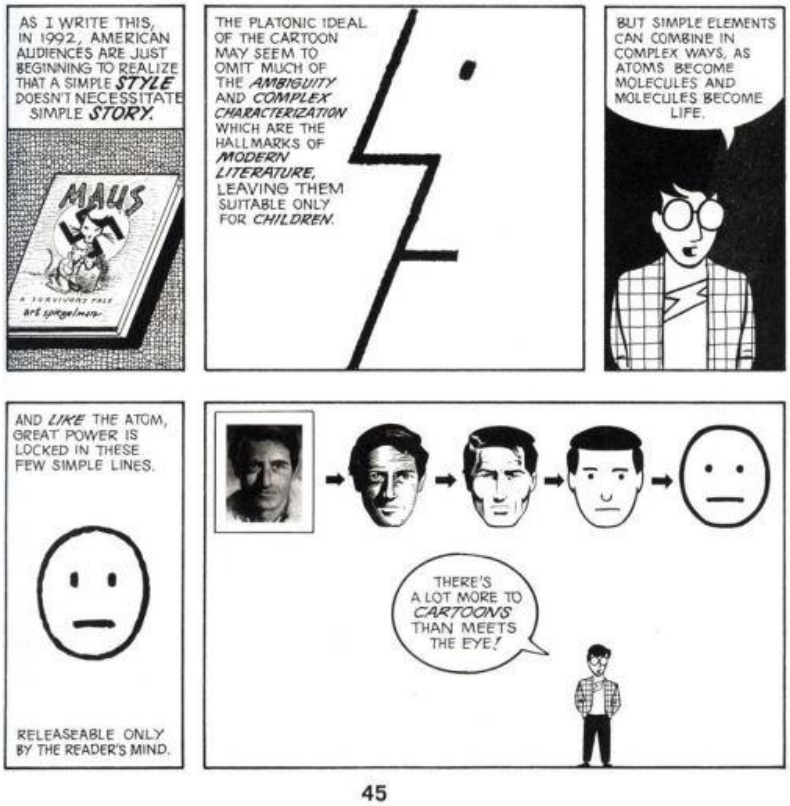


Figure 27. Page 45.
Understanding Comics.

Figure 28. Breaking the fourth wall. Maus.

Maus has further been criticized for its breaking of the fourth wall as an interruption of the main narrative, though others argue that this interplay between past and present and between Art and Vladek gives the story more depth. Flory contends that the iconoclastic anthropomorphizing achieved by Spiegelman is only possible because of this element, writing: "it is the intimately personal nature of this framing story that makes possible Spiegelman's most surprising use of indirection—his decision to draw his Jewish characters with the heads of mice" (Flory 37), which makes this additional narrative integral to Spiegelman's choice of controversial media.

With *Maus* Spiegelman successfully integrates Vladek's Holocaust narrative with his own, and with *MetaMaus* he approaches the plethora of critiques thrown its way by explaining he rationale behind each controversial measure. While Vladek's post-war accounts are bound within the inherent limitations of memory, *Maus* creatively acknowledges these and other limitations by using the nontraditional graphic novel medium to turn potentially disrupting moments into some of the most important. Spiegelman takes great care to accomplish all this while maintaining the integrity of his father's narrative. The creative and historically-driven anthropomorphizing of the Jewish protagonists into mice allows the reader to have a more complete understanding of the Holocaust while shielding them from experiencing secondary trauma, and because of this it can be used in the education of older students who already have a cursory understanding of the Holocaust.

Like *Maus,* "The Standover Man" utilizes drawn, anthropomorphized animals to convey complex concepts of isolation and anxiety but "The Standover Man" also conveys a message of

resilience and hope. Zusak created "The Standover Man" through his character of Max Vandenberg as "a short anthropomorphic fable in the self-ironic manner of Spiegelman's *Maus* tales" (Huggan 10), which points to the fact that these Holocaust narratives have and have the potential to inspire later works that can in turn be used for the benefit of educating children about the Holocaust. Another element that links *Maus* and *The Book Thief* are the way in which they use their inherent removal from reality as a strength rather than a weakness by "consciously inhabit[ing] the condition of [their] own belatedness, using it to reflect on the impossible necessity of representing the Holocaust and of recovering the lost memories of another's past" (Huggan 10). Despite these similarities, there are also key differences in these unconventional narratives. "the first comic strip artist to win a Pulitzer Prize for his comics is Art Spiegelman, whose *Maus*, in two volumes, has gained him international fame" (Buhle 4).

In *Maus*, which has been described by Senior Lecturer Paul Buhle as "arguably the most self-consciously Jewish work on the printed page" (Buhle 121), when Art is with his father he is shown as a mouse just like the rest of his family because of his shared Jewish identity with them, but when he is pictured alone he is often shown as a man wearing a mouse mask. In "The Standover Man" only Max and his father are birds, not just wearing bird masks. The ninth page of "The Standover Man" shows Max, a human, looking in the mirror and seeing himself as a bird with the caption "the girl says I look like something else" (Zusak 230). Max doesn't see himself as a bird until Liesel does, so he defines himself in his narrative to her acknowledging his otherness while also pointing out that the way he sees himself and the way she sees him are different, but both are valid.

Maus is ultimately a tale of "the father who has survived the war, and the son who has survived the Father" (Budick 381), making it an intergenerational Holocaust narrative. Since "the

father's pain…is also a bleeding into the life of the son" (Budick 380), the creation of Holocaust narratives such as *Maus* can be a successful form of therapy for both survivors rather than an event of intergenerational retraumatization. University of Leeds professor Graham Huggan points out that Zusak, like Art Spiegelman, must contend with the inherent deficiency of his parents' postmemory, defined as "that surfeit of stories, voices, images that tries – and inevitably fails – to compensate for lack of direct access to the past" (Huggan 9), however in the case of *The Diary of a Young Girl* there is no post memory to be contended with. All three of these narratives are linked by their intergenerational elements, whether it be from child to father or father to child.

The literal and metaphorical overshadowing of patriarchal figures is consistent throughout these narratives and is pictured overtly in both *Maus* and in "The Standover Man".

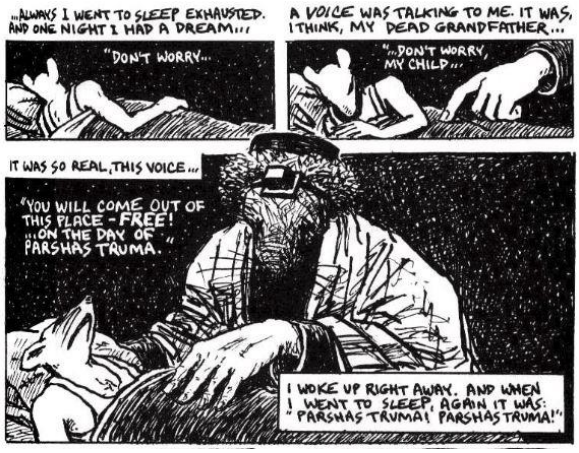


Figure 29. Page 57.
Maus.

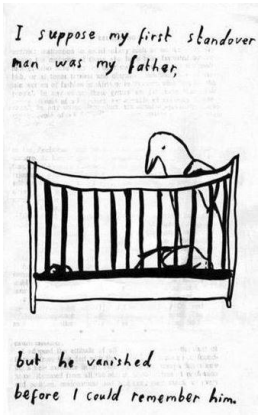


Figure 30. Page 225.
The Book Thief.

The patriarchal force in *The Diary of a Young Girl* is also powerful, but is placed in a much more positive light. Anne mentions her admiration of her father throughout her entries, calling him "Pim" and "the most adorable father I've ever seen" (Frank 9). The intergenerational aspects of these Holocaust narratives are noteworthy because in every case, whether it be the passing down of cultural heritage and memory or the restoration of it, children are telling their

parents' stories even as they tell their own. Anne's admiration of her father is preserved and given to the world by him after her death, Vladek's life story is interwoven with Art's and is published after his death, Max's redemption is made possible because his father saved Han's Hubermann's life in the first World War, and Markus Zusak was inspired to show the beauty in the narratives of tragedy he was given by his parents.

This familial interaction between survivors and their children is key because, per analytical psychologist Angela Connolly: "one of the devastating effects of such trauma is the way in which it impacts not only the survivors but also the future generations" (Connolly). The authors of these stories told in unconventional and creative ways successfully maintain what Connolly deems to be the necessary capacity "to accept the reality of the trauma with all its devastating and mind-shattering emotions without losing the capacity to imagine and to play metaphorically with images" (Connolly 607), and they can in turn provide those who learn about history through them with the same capacity for understanding and expression. This process of the narrative allowing for the student's comprehension of trauma along with maintaining the capacity for creativity means that the narrative itself can function as the student's transitional object even as the material objects themselves helped transition their authors and readers.

Another inescapable thread between these works is that of the holocaust sublime. The holocaust sublime, based on Kantian principles, "encourages the viewing subject to 'face' overwhelming horrors of the past, but without having to confront the subject's actual responsibility for the atrocities of the present" (Sanbonmatsu 1). Because "the very notion of the sublime has been transformed by traumatic history" (Ray 136) we are forced to look at it in a new light. Just as Max Vandenberg hands the unaware Liesel a story painted over *Mein Kampf*, as Art Spiegelman draws cartoon animals facing inhuman experiences, and as a young girl writes

a simple diary filled with painful thoughts, we are each handed these incomprehensible survivor's narratives in an easily observed, yet still hauntingly poignant format. While they will still be unable to fully realize the atrocities of these experiences, a wider range of students can be given an alternative look at historical events through these stories than through the traditional textual formatting. Though they are all recounting perspectives from the same political timeframe, these stories vary greatly in their depictions of the Holocaust and can speak to various age groups of students at different levels of emotional and academic comprehension.

Conclusion

"Simple elements can combine in complex ways, as atoms become molecules and molecules become life" – Scott McCloud

These Holocaust survivor's narratives have the capacity to reach and educate minds of all ages and at all different levels of learning. Anne Frank's optimistic yet introspective thoughts can be used as an introduction to the topic for elementary school students, "The Standover Man" and *The Book Thief* can be used for a more in-depth approach to reach middle school students looking to dig a bit deeper into the subject, and *Maus* can be reserved for high school students because it offers deeper metaphors, requires more prior knowledge, and does not offer the consolation or hope that both *The Diary of a Young Girl* and *The Book Thief* manage to maintain throughout their respective narratives.

A key component of what makes these narratives effective teaching tools for children to learn about the Holocaust is their self-referential nature. All three narratives are keenly aware of their own creation, from Anne's desire to be famous and her self-editing of *The Diary of A Young Girl* to Zusak's detailed description of Max's creation of "The Standover Man" to Spiegelman's creation of an entirely separate publication called *MetaMaus* which details the

creation of *Maus* and much more. In their awareness of their own content and materiality, these narratives allow beginning learners to become aware of these elements, as well. A full curriculum to teach students of all levels of emotional and academic comprehension about the Holocaust is a teaching tool that is much needed in our modern education system. While these narratives are far from the only useful resources for teaching on the subject, they can serve as effective markers for elementary, middle, and high school educational tools.

The palimpsest in the basement, the graphic novel in the ghetto, and the diary in the attic have all been the subjects of controversy due to their deceptively minimalistic formatting, however their simplicity is precisely why they are effective at the education of the Holocaust to children. Max Vandenberg, a grown adult reduced to a child-like state of loneliness offers his only possession to his dearest friend, and the beauty of that gesture conveys more than can be put to words. The complex emotional pain felt by Art Spiegelman, the survivor of the survivor, could not have been so concisely poignant without the aid of his complexly symbolic imagery. One small girl's diary, filled with her emotions, reactions, and optimism during a time of so much turmoil, is more powerful because of its childlike nature. The beauty of "The Standover Man", *Maus*, and *The Diary of a Young Girl* lies in their inconspicuous simplicity that can be continually delved into and explored for new layers of meaning. Whether it is Max Vandenberg hiding in the basement writing his story on a painted copy of *Mein Kampf*, Vladek Spiegelman evading capture in Europe and later relaying his story to his son, or Anne Frank hiding with her family in an attic and writing in her beloved diary about her experiences, these narratives are radically different, yet hold much in common. They are unconventional, but their originality is precisely why they should be studied with interest instead of thrown away in favor of a more traditional narrative style.

Notes:

1. https://www.readanybook.com/online/565085
2. http://www.readcomics.tv/maus-a-suvivors-tale-1986/chapter-1
3. https://blog.shaharia.com/assets/download/Anne-Frank-The-Diary-Of-A-Young-Girl.pdf
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